

AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS

IN THE CLAIMS:

Claims 1-10 (Canceled)

11. (Currently amended) A process for preparing adiponitrile and methylglutaronitrile, characterized by the following process steps:

- (a) reacting a reactant stream comprising pentenenitriles with hydrogen cyanide in the presence of at least one catalyst and of at least one promoter to obtain a reaction stream which comprises pentenenitriles, the at least one nickel(0)–phosphorus ligand complex as a catalyst, catalyst degradation products, the at least one Lewis acid as a promoter, adiponitrile and methylglutaronitrile,
- (b) distilling the reaction stream to obtain a stream 3 which is depleted in pentenenitriles and comprises the at least one catalyst, catalyst degradation products, the at least one promoter, adiponitrile and methylglutaronitrile as the bottom product, and a stream 4 enriched in pentenenitriles as the top product,
- (c) extracting the stream 3 using an extractant which is selected from the group consisting of cyclohexane, methylcyclohexane, n-hexane, n-heptane, isomeric C6, C7, C8, C9 cycloaliphatics, isomeric C6, C7, C8, C9 isovaliphatics, cis-, trans-decahydronaphthalene and mixtures thereof present in stream 5 to obtain a stream 6 enriched with extractant as the top product which comprises the catalyst, and a stream 7 depleted in extractant as the bottom product which comprises catalyst degradation products, the at least one promoter, pentenenitriles, adiponitrile and methylglutaronitrile,
- (d) adding 3-pentenenitrile to the stream 6 to go into a distillation column, distilling the stream 6 to obtain a stream 8 comprising the catalyst as the bottom product and a stream 9 comprising the extractant as the top product,

(e) distilling the stream 7 to obtain a stream 10 as the bottom product which comprises catalyst degradation products, the at least one promoter, pentenenitriles, adiponitrile and methylglutaronitrile, and a stream 11 comprising the extractant as the top product,

(f) distilling the stream 10 to obtain a stream 12 as the bottom product which comprises catalyst degradation products, the at least one promoter, adiponitrile and methylglutaronitrile, and a stream 13 comprising pentenenitriles as the top product,

wherein the stream 4 and/or the stream 13 enriched in pentenenitriles comprises cis-2-pentenenitrile and (E)-2-methyl-2-butenitrile and is at least partly distilled to obtain a stream 18 depleted in cis-2-pentenenitrile and (E)-2-methyl-2-butenitrile, and a stream 19 enriched in cis-2-pentenenitrile and (E)-2-methyl-2-butenitrile, and the stream 18 is recycled at least partly into process step (a).

(g) distilling the stream 12 to obtain a stream 14 as the bottom product which comprises catalyst degradation products and the at least one promoter, and a stream 15 as the top product which comprises adiponitrile and methylglutaronitrile,

(h) distilling the stream 15 to obtain a stream 16 comprising adiponitrile as the bottoms and a stream 17 comprising methylglutaronitrile as the top product.

12. (Previously presented) The process according to claim 11, wherein the reactant stream stems from a homogeneous hydrocyanation of butadiene in the presence of a nickel (0) catalyst.

13. (Previously presented) The process according to claim 11, wherein the extractant used is anhydrous.

14. (Previously presented) The process according to claim 11, wherein stream 9 and/or stream 11 are recycled at least partly into process step (c).

15. (Previously presented) The process according to claim 11, wherein process step (g) is performed as a two-stage distillation, by squeezing the stream 14 obtained in process step (g) in a

subsequent process step (m) and diluting the squeezed stream 14 with at least a portion of the stream 17 obtained in process step (h) and comprising methylglutaronitrile.

16. (Previously presented) The process according to claim 11, wherein the stream 9 obtained in process step (d) comprises less than 10% by weight of pentenenitriles.

17. (Previously presented) The process according to claim 12, wherein the extractant used is anhydrous.

18. (Previously presented) The process according to claim 13, wherein stream 9 and/or stream 11 are recycled at least partly into process step (c).

19. (Previously presented) The process according to claim 12, wherein stream 9 and/or stream 11 are recycled at least partly into process step (c).

20. (Previously presented) The process according to claim 14, wherein process step (g) is performed as a two-stage distillation, by squeezing the stream 14 obtained in process step (g) in a subsequent process step (m) and diluting the squeezed stream 14 with at least a portion of the stream 17 obtained in process step (h) and comprising methylglutaronitrile.

21. (Previously presented) The process according to claim 13, wherein process step (g) is performed as a two-stage distillation, by squeezing the stream 14 obtained in process step (g) in a subsequent process step (m) and diluting the squeezed stream 14 with at least a portion of the stream 17 obtained in process step (h) and comprising methylglutaronitrile.

22. (Previously presented) The process according to claim 12, wherein process step (g) is performed as a two-stage distillation, by squeezing the stream 14 obtained in process step (g) in a subsequent process step (m) and diluting the squeezed stream 14 with at least a portion of the stream 17 obtained in process step (h) and comprising methylglutaronitrile.

23. (Previously presented) The process according to claim 15, wherein the stream 9 obtained in process step (d) comprises less than 10% by weight of pentenenitriles.
24. (Previously presented) The process according to claim 14, wherein the stream 9 obtained in process step (d) comprises less than 10% by weight of pentenenitriles.
25. (Previously presented) The process according to claim 13, wherein the stream 9 obtained in process step (d) comprises less than 10% by weight of pentenenitriles.
26. (Previously presented) The process according to claim 12, wherein the stream 9 obtained in process step (d) comprises less than 10% by weight of pentenenitriles.
27. (Previously presented) The process according to claim 11, wherein the catalyst in process step (a) is a zero valent nickel bidentate phosphorus complex.